



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

News Release

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FORMER ORANGE COUNTY JUDGE PLEADS GUILTY TO POSSESSION OF CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

Charges Stem from Investigation by ICE and Irvine Police Department

SANTA ANA, Calif. – A former Orange County superior court judge pleaded guilty today to four felony charges of possessing child pornography, admitting that he had at least 100 images of minor boys engaged in sexually explicit conduct.

Ronald C. Kline, 65, pleaded guilty to four of seven counts contained in a grand jury indictment, acknowledging that the images of child pornography were on his home computer, two computer floppy disks, and one Zip drive disk. The charges are the result of a joint investigation involving the Irvine Police Department and agents with the former U.S. Customs Service, who are now part of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Kline was initially indicted by a federal grand jury in November 2001 after law enforcement authorities executed a search warrant at his Irvine home and discovered the child pornography. The investigation started after the Irvine Police Department received information that Kline kept a diary on his computer chronicling his sexual interest in young boys.

While the case was pending, Kline challenged the search that turned up the child pornography, arguing that the person who used a “Trojan Horse” program to access his computer was acting as a government agent. United States District Judge Consuelo B. Marshall granted Kline’s motion to suppress the evidence of child pornography. The government appealed and the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals reversed the ruling, finding that the person who searched Kline’s computer was not acting as a government agent because no one in law enforcement knew or approved of the search. Earlier this year, the United States Supreme Court declined to review the matter.

The four counts of possession of child pornography carry a statutory maximum sentence of 20 years in federal prison. In a plea agreement filed Friday, the government and Kline agree that the United States Sentencing Guidelines call for a sentence of 27 to 33 months in federal prison. However, this assessment is not binding on Judge Marshall, who is scheduled to sentence Kline on March 27, 2006.

As a result of his conviction, Kline will be required to register as a sex offender once he is released from prison. Kline remains free on bond, however he continues to be subject to home confinement.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.